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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000104

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/09/2018
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [NATO](#) [MK](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: UNUSUALLY POSITIVE NAME ISSUE MEDIA
BLITZ

REF: A. SKOPJE 98

[1](#)B. SKOPJE 99

Classified By: POLOFF NEISULER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Front-page press on February 8 covered statements on the name issue by President Crvenkovski, PM Gruevski and FM Milososki. A day after the Ambassador's meetings with Crvenkovski and Gruevski (reftels), the two leaders, who disagree on nearly every other issue, issued a unified message about Macedonia's readiness to engage with Greece for a viable name solution. Although Gruevski floated in public the notion that any agreement on the name would have to be endorsed in a referendum, Crvenkovski helpfully steered the debate away from the dilemma of "national identity vs. NATO membership" towards the goal of ridding the country of the detested FYROM acronym. End summary.

WE WANT NATO, BUT BE PREPARED FOR A GREEK VETO...

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 8, all Macedonian and Albanian-language dailies ran front-page reports on February 7 statements by President Crvenkovski, PM Gruevski and, to a lesser extent, FM Milososki on the name issue. "Vecer," the daily closest to the government, quoted the President as saying that the next few weeks were a "key period" when Macedonia needed to show "through compromise and arguments that we deserve NATO membership." The widely circulated independent newspaper "Utrinski Vesnik" pointed out that, even though the three statements were made at different venues, they sounded "coordinated" and conveyed "a unified message." Both Gruevski and Crvenkovski talked about the country's commitment to NATO membership, but made it clear that "the people should be ready for a Greek veto."

FED UP WITH "FYROM"...

[1](#)3. (SBU) Reporting on the President's desire to see the issue resolved, "Dnevnik" added that a solution of the name issue would be a way of eliminating the "anachronistic FYROM." The popular and balanced Albanian-language newspaper "Fakti" carried a front page article entitled "Crvenkovski Fed up with FYROM." The moderate "Dnevnik" led with a description of the "common position" of the President and the

Prime Minister about Macedonia's readiness to talk to Greece to find a solution that would not sell out Macedonia's national interests.

IT'S NOT ONLY MY COUNTRY: REFERENDUM ON THE NAME...

14. (SBU) Regardless of their political stripes, all press quoted PM Gruevski's position that "a small political elite, even if it represents both the government and the opposition," should not decide alone such a "fundamental question." Echoing President Crvenkovski's statement that the name is related to the nation's identity and history, Gruevski floated for the first time in public the idea of a referendum on the name.

COMMENT: ENCOURAGING SIGNS...AND IN PUBLIC!

15. (C) Just days after the Ambassador's meetings with Crvenkovski and Gruevski to discuss the name and Macedonia's NATO membership, both leaders sent encouraging signals through the media about their willingness to work with Greece on a compromise solution to the name dispute. Even the most pro-government papers, which never miss an opportunity to insult Crvenkovski, covered both leaders' statements in an unbiased manner, and helped to reframe the debate from "national identity or NATO" to ridding Macedonia of the detested FYROM acronym. Gruevski's referendum idea, which he also presented to the Ambassador (ref B), has now been launched in a probable attempt to gauge the public's mood and perhaps also as a way to begin introducing the idea of some compromise ahead. Taken together, these developments constitute a positive step forward toward a possible resolution of the name issue that could open the door to a NATO invitation for Macedonia.

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